



Commonwealth Observer Group

Uganda Presidential and Parliamentary Elections
February 2006

News Release

Arrival Statement by HE Sir Ketumile Masire, Chairperson of the Commonwealth Observer Group

On behalf of the Commonwealth Observer Group, may I say how pleased we are to be here in Uganda. Three of our members are yet to arrive, but most are here and we begin work today.

The Commonwealth Secretary-General has sent us here at the invitation of the Government, and after a visit by a Commonwealth Secretariat Assessment Mission last month.

That Mission concluded that there would be broad support from the political parties for the presence of Commonwealth Observers. It said that we would be able to observe all stages of the process.

Our Terms of Reference from the Commonwealth Secretary-General state that we are here:

- to consider the various factors impinging on the credibility of the electoral process as a whole;
- to assess whether, in our own judgement, the conditions exist for a free expression of will by the electors; and
- to determine if the results of the elections reflect the wishes of the people.

We will be neutral, impartial, objective and independent.

We cannot visit every polling station or be present everywhere. But we can and will attempt to take a representative sample of the process, so that we can arrive at a broad overview.

We will see the end of the immediate pre-election period – the final preparations for the election and the campaign. We will visit as many polling stations as we can. And we will see the results process through from the counts to the collation at the District Centres.

We will travel extensively, consult widely and take every opportunity to see the process for ourselves. We look forward to

meeting as many people of this country as possible. We will cooperate closely with other international and domestic election observers. We will, of course, abide by the laws of this country.

Each of us has been selected by the Commonwealth Secretary-General to participate in our individual capacities. We represent the whole Commonwealth. We are independent of our governments and any organisations to which we belong. Our concern is purely with the electoral process and its credibility.

One of our observers and a member of the staff support team have already been here for almost two weeks, observing the electoral environment. They will be briefing us shortly. We will then be briefed by members of the Electoral Commission, political parties, non-governmental organisations, Commonwealth High Commissioners and others. On Saturday we will deploy around the country to begin our observation.

After we have observed the results process we will return to Kampala to consider our report. We will take into account our direct observations of the polling and results process. We will also consider the electoral environment as a whole – the legal framework, the voter registration process, civic and voter education, the media, the freedom of the parties to campaign, and the freedom of the voters to vote as they wish. We will write the report here and sign it before we depart on 3 March.

When we leave we will submit our report to the Commonwealth Secretary-General. He will in turn forward it to the Government, the Electoral Commission, the leadership of all the political parties and then to all Commonwealth governments. The report will then be made publicly available, here and throughout the Commonwealth.

You will, I am sure, want to know when you may hear from us again. I should tell you therefore that we will not be producing a running commentary on the election, day by day.

We may issue an interim statement after the polls close on 23 February. We may make further statements after that, on the results process – a part of the whole to which we attach particular importance. We are also likely to make a 'departure statement'. I am the Group's spokesman and will speak on behalf of the Group as a whole.

We wish the people of Uganda well as they approach the conclusion of this electoral process.

14/02/06
